

Harbinger: Ecological Dysfunction and Gamescape Failure

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Fig. 3. 00115A8F (2025), preliminary sculpture



Fig. 1. *Aphelocoma coerulescens* (2025)



Background

- Florida is an ecological hotspot with a vast array of freshwater wetland, coastal, and upland ecosystems. The state supports many plant and animal species that are incapable of surviving anywhere else and which experience unique challenges imposed by climate change.
- Climate change will produce detriments that aren't always obvious or visible. Changes to the timing of life cycle events, susceptibility to disease and parasites, and potability of water, will affect numerous species of animals in ways not always easy to predict.
- In computer software, visual errors like lagging, misplacement, repetition, and stretching of assets are symptoms of an unseen error within hidden programming. An individual may not realize that their actions have pushed a program beyond its capacity until these bugs manifest visually.
- Habitat loss is the eminent cause of environmental stress in Florida which increased dramatically in the 1950's when the state underwent one of the country's fastest ever sustained population and development booms.
- Fallout is an alternate history videogame series beginning in 1997 that critically explores American culture, politics, and capitalism after mass environmental destruction, satirizing a popular chromatic vision of the future that belonged to the country in the 1950's while it was experiencing immense growth after WWII.
- Artists like Kristoffer Zetterstrand have utilized videogame environments and their limitations as artmaking tools for landscape abstraction in the creation of traditional paintings.

Abstract

To be human in 2025 for millions of individuals means to navigate a world highly saturated in spectacle, technology, and human regimes of order. Evolutionarily, we are a young species, but as we adopt and seamlessly integrate new technology into our lives at an accelerating pace, our animal history can feel increasingly abstract, unnecessary, or discarded. Our dissociation from the land that sustains us exacerbates the climate crisis as we attempt to live separately from it. My body of work investigates Florida ecological dysfunction as a result of human intervention through the language of software limitations, video games, and computer bugs. Each sculptural assemblage is a hybrid digital object made into a physical obstruction, composed of layered, intersected, suspended, and painted wooden panels. My sculptural assemblages analogize ecosystems with software, reimagining the complex interactions between species and environment as a program of coded steps that sustains itself within parameters on a hardware that accommodates the needed resources. Both kinds of systems support only a predetermined number of outcomes and are susceptible to disruption through human interference. Video game environments manifest these disruptions visually, and I borrow from the language of broken video game wildernesses to represent real environmental harms that often go unnoticed or represent long term harms that have yet to manifest.

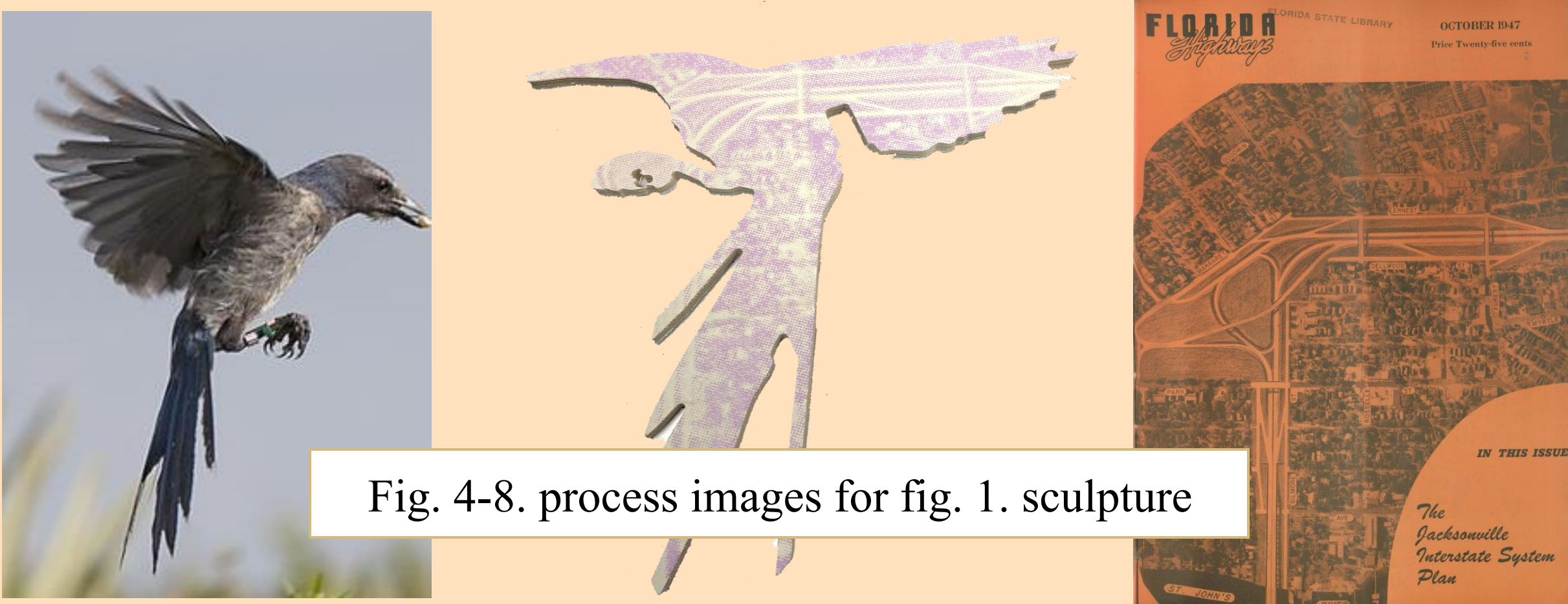


Fig. 4-8. process images for fig. 1. sculpture

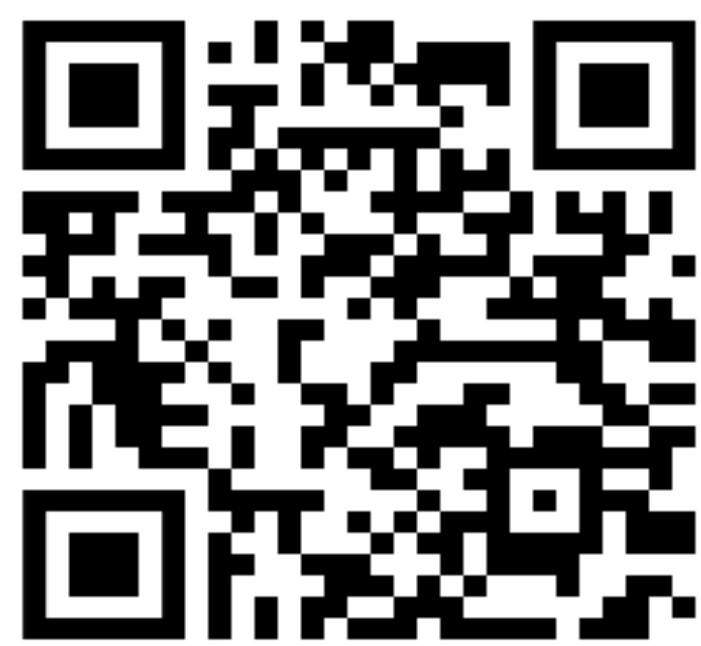
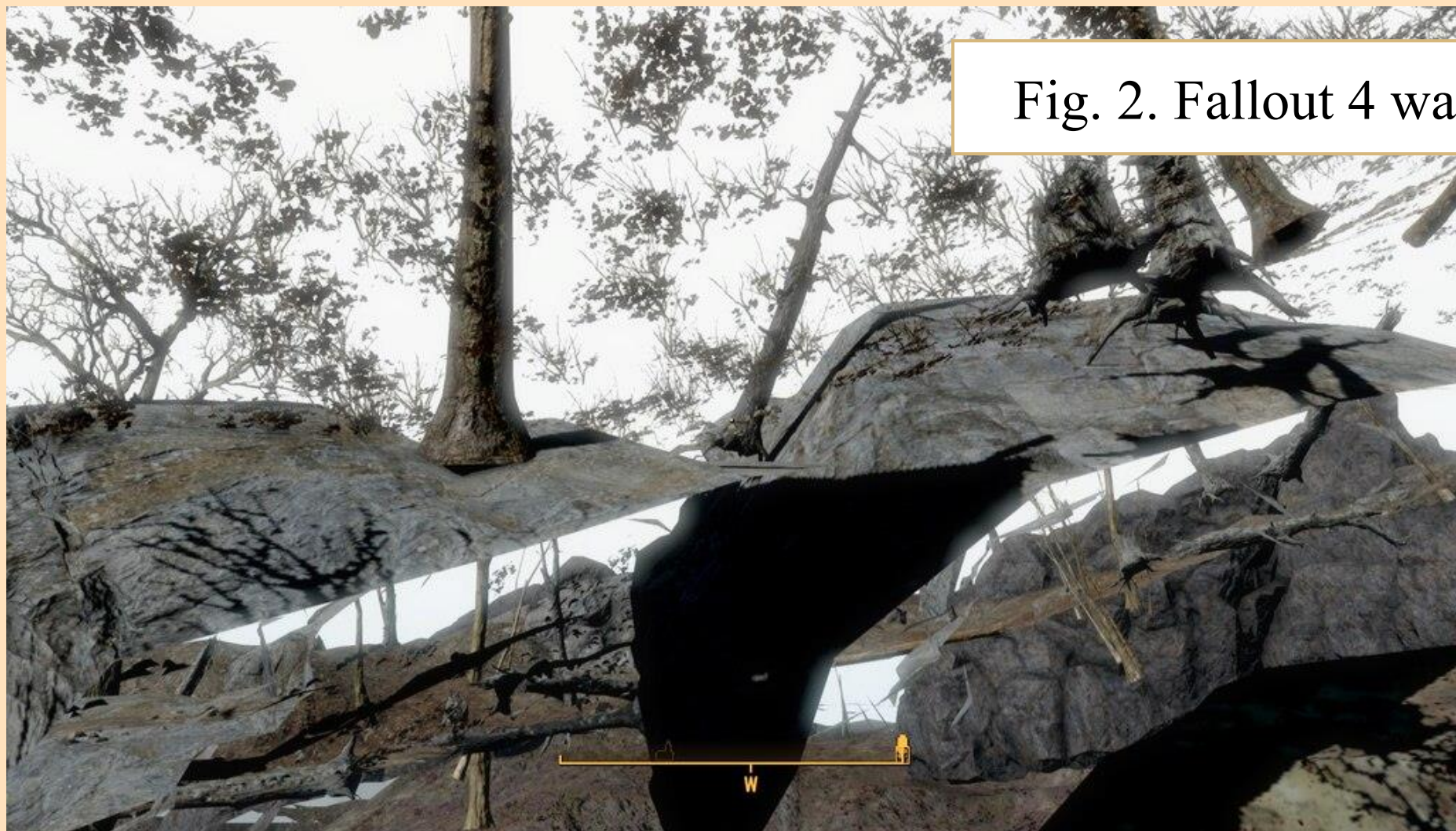
Methods

- Sculptural components were derived from exploratory interventions into prohibited spaces throughout Fallout 4's wasteland setting. Imagery of Florida species were sourced ethically online.
- Collected imagery was repeatedly combed and curated. Select imagery was isolated and reproduced in miniature on cardstock paper using a Cricut Explore.
- The paper assets were arranged into numerous compositional 3D models. A select few of these are reiterated and edited a few more times.
- My final paper compositions serve as the blueprint for my large scale sculptures. The assets that make these up are upscaled, vectorized, and cut from wooden panels using a CNC router.
- Each piece is primed, painted, and screen printed on before assembly can be completed. The screen printed imagery is derived from 1940's-1960's editions of The Florida Highways Magazine, which documented the state's largest land development boom.
- The final artworks represent an interchangeable archive of unmoored landscapes and animal inhabitants that can be constructed in new ways according to exhibition setting.

Conclusions

- Recontextualized through a fine arts lens, virtual wildernesses and their limitations are capable of evoking meaningful conversations about our disconnection from the lands we inhabit.
- Creative inquiry offers a compelling means to meaningfully work through discomfort around topics like climate change. By fostering creative problem solving skills and greater climate awareness, creative inquiry practices are capable of preparing and energizing community members to tackle larger problems together.

Fig. 2. Fallout 4 wasteland viewed without collision active



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References